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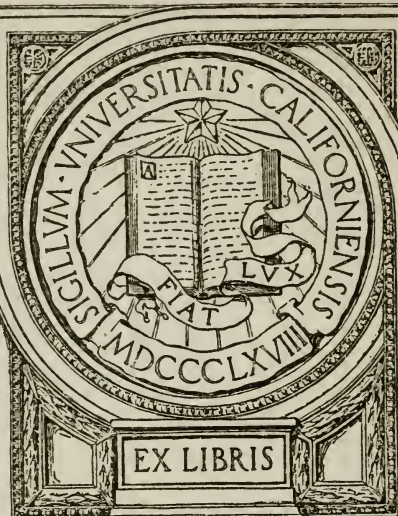
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THE IDEALS
OF FRANCE: A
LETTER ON
THE GREAT WAR

By PAUL SABATIER

Author of "The Life of St. Francis of Assisi"

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THE IDEALS OF FRANCE

M. PAUL SABATIER'S LETTER

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January 22, 1915*

M. Paul Sabatier, author of the "Life of St. Francis of Assisi," has addressed the following eloquent letter to Professor Falcinelli, the president of the International Society for Franciscan Studies at Assisi, of which M. Paul Sabatier is honorary president. It was written in reply to a letter in which Professor Falcinelli enclosed a resolution in favour of peace which the council of the Society had passed shortly before Christmas.

M. Paul Sabatier, one of whose brothers fell at Gravelotte in 1870, and whose only son is fighting in the Argonne, was for many years

pastor at Strassburg after the German occupation. The great influence which he acquired in Strassburg rendered him obnoxious to the German authorities, who, after having failed to silence him, expelled him from Alsace. One of his books, "L'Orientation Religieuse de la France Actuelle," first revealed, some years ago, the moral strength of France. In his present letter he defines, for the benefit of his Italian friends and fellow-students of St. Francis, the spirit in which the people of France regard the war.

Dec. 26.—My dear President,—My hearty thanks for your cordial letter. I hasten to reply; excuse me if I do so more briefly than I should wish.

First let me express my delight that your friend and mine, Luzzatti, should have accepted the presidency of the committee *Pro Belgio*. The noble Belgian nation is doubtless to be pitied, but it is still more to be admired. Its tribulations will pass, but its laurels will not fade.

The Belgians went to certain destruction,

with a firmness unexampled in history, in honour of a principle, whereas they might easily have secured handsome payment for granting a right of way through their country, and might also have made millions out of the German troops. Without a moment's hesitation, without giving a thought to these profits, they replied with a *non possumus* of which other nations have not, perhaps, understood the lofty heroism.

Dec. 29.—I was interrupted the other day, and have not been able to continue before. I took advantage of the Christmas holidays to go and speak in the neighbouring villages and to admire the quiet courage of our countryside. It is as though the words "In your patience possess ye your souls" had been spoken for our people.

As to my feeling about your manifestation in favour of peace, you understand, do you not, that, as a belligerent, and a belligerent the more determined in that I was before firmly pacific, I look upon it all with an eye very different from yours? A Frenchman cannot now utter the word "peace." To use it would be akin

to treason. When a quarrel is for money, or for a strip of territory, one can make peace without moral loss. To make peace when an ideal is at stake is an abdication; even to think of it is to be false to the voice which tells us that man is born for other things than to enjoy the moral and material heritage of his fathers.

NATURE OF THE STRUGGLE

It is the honour of Belgium, France, and their Allies to have seen at once the spiritual nature of this war. No doubt we are fighting for ourselves, but we are fighting, too, for all peoples. The idea of stopping before the goal is reached cannot occur to us—and we find some difficulty in understanding how it can occur to lookers-on. We are grateful to them for the excellence of their intentions, but we are somewhat embarrassed by the thought that they are more careful of our physical than of our moral life. Our soldiers are martyrs; they bear witness to a new truth. Their defeat would mean the triumph in Europe of brute force, supported by the two

spiritual forces which it has mobilized—science and religion. Before permitting that, it is our duty to fight, without even thinking of what may befall. And if our soldiers go down to the last man, everybody who has not yet taken up arms will fight to the last cartridge, to the last stone of our mountains that we can hurl against a “Kultur” which is naught save worship of the sword and of the golden calf.

The France of to-day is fighting religiously. Catholics, Protestants, men of Free Thought, we all feel that our sorrows renew, continue, and fulfil those of the Innocent Victim of Calvary. But they are birth-pangs; we may die of them, but we have not the right not to bless the present hour and to take up with rejoicing the task before us.

The peace which St. Francis preached was not peace at any price, peace as an end in itself. Like many others before him, he repeated “Righteousness and Peace have kissed each other”—righteousness first and then peace. There is no true or lasting peace that is not based on justice. He did not beg the people of Perugia no longer to make war on

Assisi. He began by fighting them; and later on, at the end of his life, he did not preach peace to these same people, but told them that the wrongs they had committed would be avenged.

Besides, unless I am mistaken, you will soon feel what I am saying. It seems to me that Italy is preparing soon to enter the lists. She will come in at her own time for practical reasons, and also, I am sure, for reasons of ideal. And in the thrill of enthusiasm that will run through you all, from farthest Sicily to the Alpine peaks, you will feel the mysterious workings of spiritual creation, as yet incomplete, but which strives to realize itself in and by us. You will then see how necessary it is for a nation, as for a man, to take the rare chances that are offered him to fulfil his destiny and realize his ideal.

THE FAITH OF FRANCE

This is what our soldiers—I see it by their letters—and what our peasants—I hear it in their talk—feel and understand better than I

can express it. What France of the Crusades stammered, what France of the Revolution saw dimly, France to-day desires to accomplish. She believes with all her strength in victory because she has indomitable faith in the ideal of justice and truth that is in her heart. But she does not need to believe in victory in order to fight, for to give up fighting would be to betray her past, her ideal, her vocation. What matter that she die at her task if she has done *her* work?

The other day I read in a Swiss newspaper that one must go to France to see a people whom the war has not perturbed. It seems that in neutral Switzerland there is greater moral distress than in France. This is quite natural. In the ideal work we are now doing we have again found the secret of the life of nations—to labour together at a hard task and to be faithful to the Spirit of Life that is embodied in the Creation. This is why I have found no trace of hatred of the enemy or wish for reprisals in the letters of our soldiers, who are enduring what they endure.

My son Jacques is grateful for your thought

of him. He is still in the first line in the Argonne. His last letter is dated December 23.

Au revoir, my dear President. In these last days of 1914 I embrace you and wish I could embrace all the people of Assisi, the "black," the "red," and the "white"; for I shall never be able to tell you how fond I am of you all. Long live Italy! and may 1915 bring to the eldest of the Latin nations those victories, material and spiritual, that will reform Europe and place civilization itself on new foundations.

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